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SPAIN'S PRESENT ROLE AS A CROSSROAD

BY

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SPAIN'S PRESENT ROLE AS A CROSSROAD

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

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The location of the Iberian Peninsula as the most distant point from Asia within the European continent makes it the closest to Africa, from which it is separated by only 14 km., and to the Atlantic Ocean and thus the Americas. This gives Spain a special strategic value. This explains why the peninsula, and Spain in particular, has been an essential crossroad in world history, as an intersection of the routes where Europe meets Africa and which cross the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. These facts, the integration of Spain into the NATO alliance, some initiatives that Spain has backed, and occasionally sponsored, about security and cooperation in the Mediterranean, are reviewed in this paper, as well as both the relationship between Spain and the Maghreb countries and between Spain and those in the Western Mediterranean.

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INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean, in which maritime history began, has significant importance in today's world order. It is important geographically, politically, economically and militarily. Besides these factors, there are in the region several contrasts and elements of tension due to different political regimes, religions and cultural heritages, economic resources and the existence of crises situations. The region is considered a confrontation arena between the superpowers; each has tried to establish and then promote its military presence and influence there.

The region's nations have tried to cooperate among themselves to lessen tension and to promote peace and security in the region. These attempts still need more effort to achieve better results.

This paper analyzes the current economic and political relationships between Spain and the Maghreb countries, and the relationships with the Mediterranean western countries looking for new approaches that contribute to a better understanding of the environment in that area. The participation of both superpowers and all countries in the region is an essential requirement to change the Mediterranean region to a "peaceful lake."

Throughout history Spain has always been present in the Mediterranean, being the superpower of the area during the 16th

and 17th centuries, after the Turkish defeat (1571) in the battle of Lepanto. Its influence was decreasing little by little at the same time its empire was vanishing. However, the Spanish presence in the west, with the control of Gibraltar, is an element of equilibrium, reinforced by the possession of the Balearic and Canary Islands, as well as the cities of Ceuta and Melilla to the south of the Strait under the Spanish sovereignty since the end of the 15th century, hundreds of years before Morocco emerged as a new nation, according to the concept of international law.

The integration of Spain into the NATO alliance added a new dimension to the general situation in the area. The problems and conflicts affecting Spain become a part of the questions affecting the area as a totality.

The areas of Spanish interest are focused on two points:

- * Western Mediterranean, especially the Maghreb and the old Spanish Sahara conflict that are closely interrelated.
- * Eastern Mediterranean, especially the Middle East and Greek-Turkish conflicts.

SPAIN AND THE MAGHREB

The Maghreb is to Spain a key region for political, economic and security reasons. The issues of Ceuta and Melilla, energy, fishing, and the Maghreb as a frontier with the Arab countries and the Third World illustrate Spanish concern about this geographical area.

Spanish policy in the Maghreb has been defined by the President of the government as a policy of "jointness and not a balance, of cooperation and not of confrontation and of non interference in the international affairs of the countries." There is a will to change the previous political approaches from a position of "balance" to a future policy of globality, understanding the area as a whole.¹

Although the old Spanish Sahara is not located in the area, the problems derived from it affect Spanish-Moroccan relations. The Spanish decision to withdraw from the Sahara was announced to the UN Secretary General on February 26, 1976. In return, the Moroccans apparently tendered vague guarantees regarding the security of the Canary Islands and Spain's North African presidios and allowed the Spanish to retain a 35 percent interest in the Bu Craa phosphate mines.² Spain ended its presence as the administrative power on the West Sahara Territory. Spain stated that its mission would not be finished until the Saharanis expressed their free will about their political future through the right to a fair referendum, according to the different resolutions of the UN and OAU (Organization for the Unity of Africa). The referendum was to be held before December 21, 1983. However, Morocco has ignored these resolutions, arguing that they are only "recommendations."

The Polisario Front, with Algerian support, has tried to get through arms what could not be gotten through diplomatic channels. Morocco rejects the possibility of a direct negotiation with the Polisario while it is succeeding in the

struggle, stopping the penetration of Polisario forces by building a set of defensive walls.

Spain has firmly decided to support and cooperate in any peaceful solution to the conflict, based on the right to self determination of the Saharanis and with the guarantees requested of the UN and OAU. Meanwhile, Spain will avoid any posture that can prejudice the development or the solution of the decolonization process.³

Besides the Sahara, the dispute between Spain and Morocco is centered on the Spanish territories in North Africa (cities of Ceuta and Melilla, the Alboran Island and the Rocks of Alhucemas and Velez). The Spanish people for historical reasons are very sensitive about this question. Morocco's demands are consistent and come up from time to time. But Morocco is not willing to confront Spain, and now less than ever, due to its relative international isolation. The problem, of course, is between Spain and Morocco, but with implications for the balance of the area.⁴

The superpowers will never allow the development of a crisis in such a critical area; neither will they permit the dominion of one state over the two banks of the Strait (assuming Spain recovers Gibraltar). Therefore, the United States would be in trouble, in case of crisis, due to its good relations with both countries. Morocco has the support of the Arabs and the Third World. The acceptance of the greater Maghreb could be an element of consensus among the neighbors.

Morocco probably will not bring the problem to the UN (where it has been frozen since 1975) because the Decolonization Committee disapproves the presence of Moroccan forces in the West Sahara, and Morocco will not bring the situation to the international courts because they know that the nature of the conflict cannot be supported by international law.

The Spanish population living in both cities, the historical titles dating from late in the 15th century, and the various treaties regarding frontiers, are the political and legal reasons supporting the Spanish position. Furthermore, the Constitution of the kingdom of Spain, in one of its final dispositions, recognizes specifically the Spanish nature of Ceuta and Melilla as a part of the national territory.⁵

Nobody can deny the value of the resolutions in favor of Morocco, dictated in other international organizations, such as the Arab League, Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, etc.; but there are some facts to consider in relation with them:

- * They are political, not legal, issues.
- * Their position is supported on the principle of territorial integrity, forgetting that this is an argument also utilized by the Spanish negotiators.
- * Finally, Morocco brings the issue to international fora where Spain is not a member and besides that, without any competence in the dispute.

As for the future evolution, nobody knows what is going to happen, although some assumptions can be made, based on the existing facts.

Having in mind the international situation of Morocco, with the Sahara conflict and the Atlantic tendency of its foreign policy, it does not seem logical to make a direct and urgent demand for Ceuta and Melilla. That would open a new front, and a new conflict in such a sensitive area and would provoke a frontal confrontation with Spain and a serious international crisis. Probably Morocco will keep its demands "on ice," though some political parties, mass media, local associations, etc., will press the claims.⁶ Even King Hassan from time to time makes remarks calling for a friendly and peaceful solution.

In spite of the issues--the Sahara and the Spanish territories in North Africa--relations between Spain and Morocco are generally good, with the normal ups and downs, many times coming from the internal situation in Morocco. The reasons to hope for normal relations now and in the future are:

- * The personal friendship of both kings.
- * The success of the Spanish Presidential trip in 1983 that accomplished the desired objective of opening a new personal channel of communication with King Hussan II.
- * Frequent talks of the Foreign Affairs Ministers.
- * The increasing international isolation of Morocco, as a result of the crisis in the Sahara, counseling them to keep correct relations with the few allies and friendly countries they still enjoy.
- * The weakness of the Moroccan economy and its foreign debt make it fully dependent upon the international

credits in general and those of Spain in particular, agreed in the "Fishing Agreements," signed between the two countries.⁷

Algeria

The relationship between Spain and Algeria has a different pattern. It can be defined as smooth, although some friction exists. Some disagreement is the consequence of several factors derived from the different approaches of both nations to their common interest as evidenced in:

- * Ideological differences.
- * Algerian policy is Third World-oriented.
- * Open support for the Polisario in the Western Sahara conflict.
- * Algerian support in the past for terrorist or separatist movements against the integrity of Spain.
- * Distrust of Algeria because of the good relations of Spain with Morocco and the close alignment with the United States and the Western World.

In spite of these problems there are no territorial demands. With the exception of the 16th Century, Spain was never the colonial power in Algeria that it was in Morocco.⁸ For this reason Algeria is not a potential threat to Spain from the military or political standpoint. In addition, the present regime comes from a revolution that has evolved with coherence, and it seems to be firmly settled. Despite internal disputes, the future of its relations with Spain seems to be positive. The

stability of the system contrasts with Morocco, where the risk of a revolution is still present.

Algeria is the chief importer of Spanish goods in the whole African continent. More than 6,000 Spaniards work in the country for several Spanish corporations dealing mainly with construction and public works, such as the construction of highways, dumps, etc. Both countries recently signed an important contract that states the Spanish compromise to import natural gas from Algeria, helping to establish a fair import-export balance.'

Spain is very interested in the maintenance and even improvement of the present status and the avoidance of any possible confrontation. Algeria openly helped the separatism movement of the Canary Islands, giving support to its leaders (in fact 30 of them are still living in Algeria) and providing shelter and training to the Basque terrorists.

Looking at the future, it would be useful to find new fields of common interests such as close cooperation in Mediterranean security, military matters, technological exchange, etc.

Tunisia

Spain and Tunisia are enjoying a very close friendship, although without a clear definition of their common objectives. This friendship was born in 1956 when Tunisia achieved independence, reinforcing the Spanish ties with the Arab countries in general and with those in North Africa in particular.

In the last four years, there is a growing concern in Spain about Tunisia, stimulated by the economic crisis and the need for new markets. The initiative has been very well received in the Republic due to its interest in widening the economic and political relationship, breaking in part its excessive dependence from France.¹⁰

It suits Spain, while it is possible, to support the current stability and evolution of its neighbor, according to the present tendency of the Tunisian leaders toward the Western World. Tunisia has always supported the Spanish theory about the Canary Islands, being one of the first African countries clearly recognizing the archipelago as a part of Spain. It has also endorsed the Spanish demands on Gibraltar in all international forums. Hence, the foundations for a close cooperation and understanding are established.

Libya

Since Spain decided upon withdrawal from the Sahara, the quality of the relations between Spain and Libya has improved and is stable, considering the activism and unpredictable behavior of the Libyan leader. Both countries maintain good commercial relations. Libya has the energy that Spain needs and the economic resources to import without restrictions the goods and services that Spain can provide, although those resources are decreasing because of the low prices of oil and the senseless economic policy of the Libyan government. The activism of this country can endanger relations with Spain due to hints about the

cooperation and economic support to some Canarian separatist elements and to the Basque terrorism.¹¹

Because of the past Libyan-British crisis and the charges against the Libyan Popular Office in Madrid, Spain immediately restrained the entrance of Libyan citizens into the country.

Spanish public opinion in the relatively recent conflict of that country with the United States was divided. The government maintained a position of silence that must be understood in the light of the Spanish desire to maintain its present status with Libya and not as condemnation of the American action.

However, the continuous problems with its African neighbors, the internal instability of the Republic, the growing isolation from the Arabic World and the majority of the African nations, suggest the difficulty from the Spanish standpoint to accommodate its bilateral relations with this country. Maintaining a pragmatic policy in economics while avoiding any kind of political implications that could be interpreted as a support of Libyan adventurism are Spanish policy objectives.

SPAIN AND THE EAST MEDITERRANEAN

The policy of approach and friendship with the Arab World began in the late 1940's and was developed during the 1950's. The reason for establishing strong ties with those countries was a consequence of Spanish international isolation due to its support for Germany and Italy during World War II. Although as early as 1948 Spain tried to establish diplomatic relations with the just-born Israeli state, the Jews rejected the proposal

arguing the totalitarian character of the Spanish regime and its past alignment with the Axis powers. This lack of relations with Israel was a constant in Spanish foreign policy until 1986 when the decision to open embassies in Tel Aviv and Madrid was agreed by both countries.¹²

Friendship with the Arabs has been beneficial from the political side, for Spain could support them in international fora despite conflicts of Spain with other Arab countries. The Arab community has been on the Muslim side. However, it must be clarified that this posture is a definition of pro-Arab feelings rather than anti-Spanish. In all the Arab-Israeli crises Spain has always supported the Arabic position. From the economic standpoint, the relation between the political friendship and the economic benefits that Spain has obtained are not proportional, probably because of the strong international competition and the lack of aggressiveness by the Spanish businessmen more oriented to Europe and North Africa.¹³

Regarding the Palestinian problem, the Spanish position has been to support a just, global and lasting solution, in which the Palestinian people have a voice. Spain never has recognized the annexation of the territories seized by Israel in the 1967 war, believing that there is no future in the area unless the national rights of the Palestinians are fully respected.¹⁴

The problem of Lebanon has been followed by the different Spanish governments with real interest. In the summer of 1982 during the Security Council meeting, the Spanish delegation developed an important activity in cooperation with the other

members of the council, intending to stop the fighting and secure a negotiated peace. At the same time, Spain offered to send troops as part of the multilateral force, but the proposal was rejected by Israel, arguing the lack of diplomatic relations with Spain.

This policy, however, was very well received by Arab countries in the area (Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria). Spain believes that the peace, unity and sovereignty of Lebanon has to be preserved as well as its characteristics as a multiracial and multireligious society. The Lebanese model must reappear as the example of a peaceful coexistence that it was throughout history.

The Greek-Turk conflict in Cyprus is a difficult issue for Spain. Both countries are friends and allies. Spain is interested in maintaining current good relations. Its attitude is of neutrality, although Spain never recognized the "Turkish Republic of North Cyprus," disapproving the exchange of ambassadors between that "republic" and Turkey because in the Spanish view this is a step away from the solution to the crisis. For these reasons the government of Spain has not expressed an official opinion. Only if a constitutional referendum and free elections were held would Spain openly define its position.

THE WESTERN COUNTRIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

This paper would be incomplete without some reference to the western powers in the area and their relations with Spain.

France

After the victory of the right-coalition in the French elections of 1986, a curious phenomenon occurred in this country: the coexistence of a leftist-socialist president of the nation with a rightist prime minister. Although with the normal political differences between both coalitions in monetary and social policy, there is an important agreement in the struggle against terrorism and the need to stop inflation.

France has been for many years the logistic base and sanctuary for the Spanish terrorist group, ETA.¹⁵ The infrastructure of the organization was in the southwestern Basque-France region. This area has been the shelter of the leaders and activists of the ETA terrorist band for a long time. The multiple mountain passes through the Pyrenees in the area allowed the movement back and forth of the different groups, making very difficult the observation and detection of these movements. In this way the terrorist organization enjoyed a situation of privilege from which to launch terrorist actions in the interior of Spain, knowing that they had their back protected. However, during the last two years, as a result of Spanish pressures and the improvement of relations between both governments, the product of multiple bilateral talks, French cooperation has shifted 180 degrees. The Basque region in France is no longer a safe haven for terrorists, and the organization has been almost dismantled, thanks to the open cooperation of the police and the courts of our neighbors.

The relations between armed forces of both countries are excellent, with frequent meetings of the respective general staffs, and exchange of units. Several combined maneuvers and exercises in Spain as well as in France are conducted every year with outstanding results that contribute to a better understanding of both nations after years of mutual isolation.

There are still some shadows on the horizon. France was very reluctant to accept Spanish integration in the Common Market because of the negative impact on the economy of the French farmers. The quality and the price of the agricultural products (fruits and vegetables) and Spanish wine pose an important threat to French exports to the rest of the community. However, France finally voted in favor of Spanish integration, although with some restrictions to the free trade of the Spanish products during the first five years.

In spite of these problems the future of relations is brilliant. Spain, following its policy of diversifying the acquisition of defense materiel, has become an important customer of the French armaments industry, establishing several programs of cooperation and coproduction of high technology equipment that will enhance the quality of Spanish products in the future. The main battle tank, AMX-30, made and improved in Spain, the MILAN and Roland missiles, Mirage aircraft and Super-Puma helicopter are a few examples of the close cooperation between the nations.

French relations with Arab countries have improved with the arrival of Mr. Mitterrand. This was demonstrated by the presence

of French forces in the Lebanese crisis and the support in the Chadian conflict.

In the future it seems that France will continue its foreign policy of equilibrium, intending to perform the role of leader in the area and, when possible, in Europe, independent from the two superpowers.

Italy

Italy is the best example in Europe of an economy in continuous progression based on the quality of its products, the imagination of its businessmen, and the consistency of national economic policy. Its internal problems, terrorism and separatist tendencies in Sardinia, in spite of the traditional instability of the different governments, have been almost overcome.

The relations between Spain and Italy are exceptional. The Italian government has shown open support of Spain, especially in Europe. Again and following the Spanish policy of technological interchange with foreign countries, the Italian-Spanish relations are in a process of continuous improvement.

The international policy rests in the following points:

- * Firm Europeanism. Italy is, together with Germany, the most decided defender of the European economic and political integration.
- * Atlanticism, as demonstrated in the tendency to confirm tight ties with the United States.

- * Fair relations with the European Eastern countries (mainly in the industrial and economic fields and less in the political).
- * Excellent relations with Latin America based on its large migrations to these countries, complemented by cultural and economic exchange.¹⁶

Italy is a basic element in maintaining the balance in the zone, looking for the improvement of its role as mediator between the east and west, as well as among the developing countries. Its orientation has been and remains clearly Mediterranean, intending to maintain the difficult equilibrium between its European and Mediterranean policy, as happened in the recent crisis in Libya.

As an active member of the Atlantic Alliance, Italy openly supports the presence of the U.S. 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean, providing installations in the south of the country for the necessary facilities for the operations of the American Navy in the area.

POLICY OF U.S. AND USSR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The policy of the U.S. and the USSR in the area deserves a few lines, in order to provide a clearer view of relations among the powers and among world regions.

The American policy and the consequent Mediterranean strategy has been affected for the changes in the military situation of the area. The loss of her role as the dominant power has forced the United States to greater efforts to counter

the increasing influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East and North African countries and to confront Soviet naval projection in the sea.

Most of the changes are closely related to the conflict which took place in Afghanistan, the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the past war between Iran and Iraq.

The deployment in the Mediterranean of a Soviet naval force, ever more powerful and with constantly improving technology, has influenced the political value of the 6th Fleet as an element of control and power in Southern Europe.¹⁷ The Soviet presence superimposing and trying to counterbalance the role of the United States ships, has a value that exceeds the pure military capability of such a Soviet force.

A conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union could result in the European powers being dragged along by virtue of the fact that they are aligned West to East. Such a conflict may not be in the best interest of the European states. This explains the attitude of certain European countries that were not inclined to support U.S. activities in previous crisis situations. This was manifested by a resistance to allowing the Americans free use of the military installations established for a different purpose.

In summary, the increment of Soviet military capability in the Mediterranean adds a component of complexity to the solution of possible conflicts in the basin, reinforcing the risks of a military confrontation.¹⁸ Soviet policy gives priority to political ties, and even to the supply of military resources.

Countries with an anti-Western orientation have created conflicts with the west and pro-Western Arab states. Syria, Libya and moderate Algeria are the main examples.

Moscow intends to utilize tensions in the area to support its purpose, to play a more important role in the zone by demonstrating that the local conflicts cannot be solved without Soviet cooperation and participation. However, the alliance of Moscow with the radical Arab countries is certainly a risk; but then on the other side the Soviet behavior during the Persian Gulf (Iraqi) War suggests that Moscow is considering the avoidance of such eventualities.

But not only the U.S. and the USSR have a relevant influence in the Mediterranean. From the cultural prospective, the Mare Nostrum appears as an exceptional witness of the dialogue between the three religious cultures born in it: the Christian, the Muslim and the Jewish. Probably the rise of Islam has been the biggest surprise during the past years. The renaissance of the concept of "Islam" is a very complex process that cannot be viewed as "black and white." It is a diplomatic challenge to the west as a rejection of the intent to modernize the Arab world. This is not a new process--it has been developing for more than sixty years. In it have participated the national bourgeoisies that intended a synthesis between tradition and technological and political advances (the Wald in Egypt, the Detour in Tunisia or the Istiglal in Morocco). Some symptoms of fundamentalism have appeared not only in Egypt, but in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco as well, might represent a real threat to the West.

On the other hand, when the appearance of fundamentalism, as in Iran, implies the rupture of a political situation, it does not necessarily mean an antagonism toward the West and an approach to the Eastern bloc. On the contrary, from an East-West global perception, if U.S.-supported regimes fall, it is also true that the fundamentalism is a formidable barrier against the penetration of Marxism.

CONCLUSIONS

In this environment, what role does Spain play? To begin with, it represents together with the axis Balearic-Gibraltar-Canaries, a country bridge between the Mediterranean and Atlantic. Its territory lies athwart vital world communications routes by sea, air, and land. Its island territories, the Balearics and Canaries, provide positions of important military value in the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic sea routes. The Gibraltar Strait is the narrow sea-strip between the Rock and Tarifa in the north, and Ceuta and Tanger in the south. To be strong in the Strait, it is necessary to be strong not only in those points but on the land, sea and air spaces in the vicinity and probably some hundred miles away.

Spain requires an influence in this key area to protect its own land and to contribute with the western countries to deter any common threat.

The Alboran Sea, zone of Gibraltar and Gulf of Cadiz define the so-called center of gravity of the strategic and particular

interests of Spain. By projecting its power into the Strait, Spain secures the integrity of Ceuta and Melilla against any threat coming from Morocco government or a future triumph of Islamic-revolutionary movements in North Africa.

The problems of the Mediterranean, as illustrated by the Spanish foreign minister on September 24th at Palma de Mallorca Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), are a primary dimension of Europe and a necessary condition for its stability. The possible conflicts that can arise when a high population difference in income and growth between the countries of the north and south shores of the Mediterranean and "the growing distance between the two shores comprising Western and Arab countries" all combined together. He quoted fanaticism (fundamentalism) and racism (in Europe with its high unemployment rates) as two expressions of intolerance "which mutually justify and feed on one another." What is at stake is to foresee the behavior of a series of very different cultures which, instead of distrust, must promote understanding.

The policy of Spain in this area during the last ten years has evolved from a situation of equilibrium with all the Maghreb countries to a second stage in which the Spanish diplomacy has focused mainly on Morocco.

Both approaches have pros and cons. The equilibrium supposed a lack of credibility for Spain and was interpreted as a lack of interest in establishing long-term cooperation.

Excessive commitment to Morocco is not desirable, because the relations with Algeria could encumber economic exchange and

the Canarian problem. On the other hand, a closer approach to Algeria would increase the problems with Morocco, especially in the issues of fishing permits, Ceuta and Melilla.

The Spanish policy has to be based on mutual confidence while avoiding a full commitment with its neighbors in the South.

It is necessary in the future to build a real structure to support the mutual interest and strive for cooperation with every country in the area, avoiding the defensive attitude that Spain has usually maintained. The Spanish integration in the European community is a positive step, allowing Spain to be a natural bridge linking the Maghreb and European nations. A strong and stable Maghreb can have a positive impact in Spain, giving more autonomy to its policy in the area. However, an excessive alignment of the Maghrebies with a closer Morocco-Algeria relations could increase the tensions in Ceuta, Melilla and the Canary Islands. Without the solution of the Palestinian problem and the international acceptance of the Israeli state in a pacific atmosphere, the stability in the Mediterranean is an unlikely utopia.

The Mediterranean summarizes the rivalry between the two superpowers and the north-south antagonism between the rich industrialized countries of Europe and the North Africans who are poor but owners of raw materials and resources essential to the developed nations.

The Gulf conflict underlines the suitability of initiatives that Spain has backed and occasionally sponsored, such as the

Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean and the Four Plus Five initiative.

It is clear that Islam is going to grow as a result of the Persian Gulf War, as a sublineation of the frustration that the crisis is generating in the Arab world.

The Mediterranean region needs, in guidelines ranging from security to human rights, principles on which to agree, a foundation or a type of agreement that basically translates into measures of confidence on which the whole process would be based. Clearly these principles are: the principle of territorial rights; the principle of inviolability of borders; the principle of peaceful solutions to conflicts; the principle of joint development; and the principle of tolerance and coexistence among cultures.

In summary, Spanish policy in the area must be oriented to the establishment of bilateral cooperation between Spain and the Maghreb countries--this will be a strategic necessity--and Spain will have to do whatever is necessary to strengthen it from both the bilateral and community point of view. Obviously, countries that have few means, like Spain, cannot do it alone.

ENDNOTES

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